

Address by . . .
The Honorable George F. Kennan
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FOREIGN AID IN THE FRAMEWORK OF NATIONAL POLICY

Our subject of discussion this evening is the function of foreign aid within the framework of our national policy.

It is not easy to find a useful angle from which to approach a question so tremendous and so complex in its implications as this. When we get such problems of approach, I often like to find out, if possible, how things would have appeared to the early statesmen of this Republic and where we have come from, since that time, in the development of our foreign policy. I would suggest that we use this method of approach tonight.

The first architects of United States foreign policy were extremely wary of any engagement of this country in the affairs of other nations, even along the lines of support to other nations in causes which themselves appeared entirely worthy in American eyes. John Quincy Adams, in an address delivered on the Fourth of July in 1821, pointed out that:

"... America ... has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when the conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart. She has seen that probably for centuries to come, all the contests of that Aeldama, the European world, will be contests of inveterate power, and emerging right. Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions, and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners

of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. ... She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit. ..." 1/

It is true that very soon thereafter Adams was obliged to agree to a certain modification of this view, and that modification was expressed in the message to Congress which has become known as the Monroe Doctrine. He was obliged, in other words, to place a geographic qualification on what he believed to be a valid principle of foreign policy. But I am sure that the qualification, in his mind, did not invalidate the principle.

How valid is Adams' principle today? My own answer would be that while the change in our world situation over the past century has certainly created further qualifications on what Adams stated at that time, these qualifications, like the Monroe Doctrine, are relative; and that there remains great wisdom in Adams' words--a wisdom which we would do well to bear in mind when we would otherwise have trouble coming up with satisfactory answers.

We can no longer afford, to the extent Adams could, to consider that abstention from intervention in the affairs of others is identical with an absence of responsibility. It is hard for the strong to avoid being the responsible. Our bigness and our economic might have taken us past that happy age of innocence in which we could say of the world around us: "We just work here." We have grown so much that we are today like an awkward young giant in a crowded and cluttered room: whatever we do or do not do--whatever position we place ourselves in--we cannot help affecting others.

Furthermore, we have today, from the standpoint of our national interest, a more sharply and significantly divided world than Adams had. Part of it is at least tolerant of the pursuit by us of our national ideals, even

1/ NILES' WEEKLY REGISTER, from March to September, 1821, Vol. :XX, or Vol. :VIII-New Series; Franklin Press, Baltimore. [p. 331].

though its purposes and philosophies may often vary from our own. Another part views the progress of our national life, as it has been proceeding thus far, with unfeigned and unconcealed abhorrence.

It would be dangerous to underestimate the depth and importance of this rejection of our civilization by the rulers of a great part of the world. If this were only for reasons of theoretical doctrine, we might hope that it could be overcome by reason and persuasion. Unfortunately, it seems to rest also on the hard fact that our abundance and prosperity constitute, for the part of the world to which I am referring, an incontrovertible and intolerable basis of comparison.

In the 1830's the great French traveller, the Marquis de Custine, observed:

"... The more I see of Russia, the more I understand why the Emperor forbids Russians to travel abroad, and makes his own country difficult for foreigners to visit. The political régime in Russia would not survive 20 years of free communication with the West of Europe. ..." 2/

Now the régime of Nicolas I did not really need to make its own inability to stand comparisons a reason to try to tear down all that existed, that was different, outside its own borders, nor did it have the wherewithal to attempt anything so ambitious. Today, for various reasons, there is apparently a feeling of need on the part of the successors to Nicolas I to eliminate unpleasant standards of comparison and to create conditions in which dictatorship can pursue its own peculiar processes in its own wasteful way, unhampered by the embarrassing proximity of a freer life, capable of deflecting people's thoughts and dreams from the debates of established authority--capable of keeping alive in people's hearts the flickering flame of hope for release from human bondage.

The logic of this is that we cannot view with the same impassive equanimity as Adams did the advance of what was called in Monroe's message "the political system" of

2/ LETTERS DE RUSSIE, by the Marquis de Custine; Editions de la Nouvelle France, Paris.

other powers. The powers then referred to were the arrogant and imperious courts of Europe, animated at the worst by an amused contempt for the struggling frontier republic on the western shores of the Atlantic--dangerous to it mainly in so far as their colonial rapaciousness, or what appeared to Americans of that day as their colonial rapaciousness, might cause them to make out of the new world a battleground of their conflicting greeds and interests, thus crowding our young republic on the continent of its residence or drawing it into needless and dangerous conflict.

Today it is a grimmer type of political system which faces us across the world and with the expansion of which we are concerned. It is one directed at the vitals of our power and our faith. We can no longer be so fastidious, or so restricted geographically, in our opposition to it, as were the men of Adams' time in facing the problem of their day. There are times when we must obviously move to support the efforts of others to resist attempts made to bring them into subjection to such a political system.

For it is by a program of progressive subjection, one by one, of other peoples who live between ourselves and the seat of world communism, that our adversaries believe our world can best be undermined and we ourselves best reduced to a position of helplessness and loneliness and ignominy among the nations of mankind. To help others who are thus threatened is therefore a duty not to our national interests in the narrow sense, but, as we believe, to an enlightened concept of our responsibility as a leading world power--to a belief, which we hold to be deeply creditable to our people, that our security lies in the preservation of balance and stability and confidence among the nations of the world in general.

We recognize, therefore, the necessity of engaging ourselves more directly in the affairs of many peoples far from our own shores than our forefathers would have been inclined to approve. And it is clear that this engagement must in most instances take the form of assistance to them, sometimes economic, sometimes other than economic, in the pursuit of certain of their own programs and activities. For the alternatives to this would be direct, independent intervention in the affairs of others which would run counter to the feelings of the peoples concerned and to the purposes of their legitimate governments, and we continue to have strong feelings about the impropriety of such intervention. Where we do engage ourselves in the affairs of others, we try to see that

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this is by way of assistance to others in efforts which they themselves wish to make in their own interest.

It is clear, then, that the extension of aid to others does find justification by principle in the structure of our foreign policy.

This does not mean, however, that there are not important qualifications on the conditions in which such aid can be warranted and on the results which we can expect it to produce. It is precisely on this subject, on the subject of the necessary limitations and qualifications of foreign aid as a device for the implementation of foreign policy, that there is greatest confusion and uncertainty in the public mind. Let us see what we can do to clear up some of the most common misconceptions.

Foreign aid, first of all, is not some sort of patent remedy. It is not an independent and fool-proof device, guaranteed to have universal validity and to produce certain calculable results in any and all conditions. Its efficacy is determined by the context in which it is extended and by the wisdom with which it is applied. Since no two situations are alike, there is a simple lack of logic in the voices which tell us that we should have some uniform pattern of foreign aid, and demand of our Government that it do some particular thing in one area just because it did something comparable somewhere else. There is nothing absolute or automatic about foreign aid. To attempt to standardize its application would not be consistency--it would be applied fallacy.

What do we have to take into account in determining whether we have a suitable context for the extension of some special form of governmental aid to another people?

What are the elements of a suitable context?

First, there is the question of purpose. John Quincy Adams pointed out that the motives of people are apt to be mixed, and that even when the resistance to foreign oppression may occupy a leading part among those motives, other things, such as interest and intrigue, individual avarice, envy and ambition, may also find a place and may even "assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom". We cannot undertake to dissect the political personalities of foreign peoples and to identify the component parts of

what constitutes their interpretation of their national interest. Accordingly, we cannot afford, as our forefathers correctly observed, to put ourselves into a position of sponsorship for all the motives of other governments just because we find it fit to support some of their actions. When we set out to help others, we must be acting upon our own analysis of the probable results of the undertakings to which our aid is addressed. For the actual consequences of what we do, we have to take responsibility, as mature people, before our own and world opinion. But we must be careful not to accept responsibility for all the motives and aspirations of all those to the support of whose efforts our aid may be directed or those who may profit in one way or another from it. Our task is to satisfy ourselves, before we begin to help others, that the results of our action can be expected to be ones beneficial to causes for which we ourselves are not ashamed to stand.

Second, we have to take into account the degree of resolution and vigor of purpose which lies behind the efforts of those whom we are aiding. When we set out to help other governments in something they are trying to accomplish, we must always reckon that our aid can be only relative, and relative only in a marginal sense, to the efforts they themselves may make. It can have no absolute value in itself. If their efforts are perfunctory or inefficient or faint-hearted, our aid to them can scarcely be otherwise.

Above all, our will cannot replace their will. There is a natural danger that aid given to others in undertakings which represent only the discharge of their normal responsibilities to themselves can lead to overreliance on that aid, and to a weakening rather than a strengthening of the fiber of independent action. Wherever this begins to happen we are on dangerous ground. It might almost be stated as axiomatic that where people make the receipt or non-receipt of aid from us the criterion of their own efforts--where they say "Unless you aid us we will not aid ourselves"--we can conclude that our aid would be certainly misdirected and unlikely to serve any useful purpose. Unlike our communist adversaries, we have no desire to infuse into others a foreign will to the exclusion of their own. We have no desire to give the appearance of animation and vitality to what are in reality limp and lifeless puppets. Being free men ourselves, it is in the company of free men that we would wish to move. We must be careful that the use of our

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"... Between individuals," he wrote, "occasion is not unfrequently given for the exercise of gratitude. ... But among nations ... such occasions ... perhaps never occur. It may be affirmed as a general principle, that the predominant motive of good offices from one nation to another, is the interest or advantage of the nation which performs them. ... an individual may on numerous occasions meritoriously indulge the emotions of generosity and benevolence, not only without an eye to, or even at the expense of, his own interest. But a government can rarely, if at all, be justifiable in pursuing a similar course. ...

"... It is not here meant," Hamilton continued, "to recommend a policy absolutely selfish or interested in nations; but to show, that a policy regulated by their own interest, as far as justice and good faith permit, is, and ought to be, their prevailing one: and that either to ascribe to them a different principle of action, or to deduce from the supposition of it, arguments for a self-denying and self-sacrificing gratitude on the part of a nation, which may have received from another good offices, is to misrepresent or misconceive what usually are, and ought to be, the springs of national conduct. ..." 3/

I am sure that these words of Hamilton are sound. In granting aid to others we must bear carefully in mind that each of us is the guardian of his own interest and we must not expect to be the objects in future of sentiments and manifestations of gratitude in which no other government can properly indulge. This does not apply to pure acts of charity which emanate from private individuals in our country, such as the assistance we have so often extended to others in times of disaster and suffering. It does apply to those measures of our Government which are great and deliberate acts of state, taken with due regard to, and in pursuit of, a careful appraisal of the interest of our own country.

The same principles serve as the answer to those who would regard foreign aid as a sort of an unlimited letter

3/ THE FEDERALIST, Appendix, 1813 Edition, "The Letters of Pacificus", No. IV, by Alexander Hamilton (pps. 573-575)

of credit; to be held by us, upon the future policies of other governments in any and all matters, whether related or otherwise to the immediate purpose of our aid. We have seen that when we give aid to others, it should be because we have decided that the undertakings we are setting out to support are worthy ones from the standpoint of our national purposes. In the success of these undertakings lies our reward; we should seek no other. If we do not consider this reward sufficient, the aid should not be extended, or it should not be considered as aid. If our desire is to receive consideration from another nation with respect to policies which it may adopt in future, in the conduct of its own affairs, this should be regarded not as aid, but as an international transaction, clearly spelled out and understood by both parties. It would be better to extend no aid at all to others than to have any unclarity or misunderstanding on this point.

It is clear from the nature of the world situation we see before us that foreign aid is a valuable and indispensable instrument of our foreign policy at this stage in our national development. Without it, a whole series of friendly peoples, overtaken in the wake of this recent war by abnormal strains and abnormal weaknesses, would have found it hard to maintain their national traditions, and perhaps even their independence. In the light of what I have said, however, I think you will all agree that foreign aid is an instrument which should be used with great circumspection. Used unwisely, capriciously or without regard to its inherent limitations, it can bring more harm than good not only to others but to ourselves as well, and to the whole structure of our foreign relations.

Our problem here, it seems to me, is to learn to utilize with wisdom and discretion that formidable margin of surplus energy and material values which our nation has shown itself capable of producing, and, one might almost say, incapable of not producing. Any disposal of this margin is pregnant with significance for the course of international events. Our power of disposition over it is therefore a grave responsibility for us all. This is part of our problem of growing up in the space of a few years from the youthful independence of a remote frontier community to the vast and humbling responsibilities of world leadership.

In the utilization of this instrument of foreign aid, as in the implementation of all other methods for

projecting our strength and our spirit beyond our borders, we have great need to preserve our sense of proportion and of the fitness of things. In cases of doubt, in cases where we are not too sure of our ground and not too well fortified by study and experience, let us not get too far from the simple wisdom of our forefathers, so well expressed in the passages I have cited to you this evening.

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